



Trail Talk

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

Trail Talk Volume 14, Issue 3

California Thrasher Story and photos by George Varga, Trail Guide

While hiking through Florida Canyon east of Balboa Park with camera close at hand, I heard the call of a most vocal and quite melodious bird in the distance. From previous experience I suspected that the song might be produced by a California Thrasher.

Fortunately the trail brought me closer and closer to the bird which seemed to be so absorbed in singing that my presence was of no concern. I was able to take a few pictures some of which are with this article.

The California Thrasher, *Toxostoma redivivum*, belongs to the Order *Passeriformes* (Perching Birds) and the Family *Mimidae*. Among the mimids (Latin root for the English word mimic) are the catbirds, thrashers and mockingbirds,

all known for their vocalization. The California Thrasher is found only in California and Baja California. Its habitat is in

lowlands, coastal chaparral, riparian woodlands and sometimes backyards with native vegetation.

The bird is quite common but seldom seen, because it likes to remain hidden in dense brush. It feeds generally on the ground, being quite noisy as it uses its sturdy, curved beak to 'thrash' about in leaf litter in quest of insects, its favorite food. It will also feed on berries when present. When vocalizing, however, it likes to show off its vocal skills by perching up high on a bush as if showing off its vocal skills to the world.

The California Thrasher is

about 12 inches (30 cm) in length, weighs about 3 ounces (85 g), it has a long tail, a strong and downward curving beak, and a dark eye line. The overall coloration



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Writers wanted...

- Have an interesting story or photo you'd like to share with other Trail Guides? Send them to 'Trail Talk' editor Millie Basden at trailtalkeditor@yahoo.com. Please include "Trail Talk" in the subject line!

Speakers Needed...

- Have you heard an interesting speaker or know an interesting topic that would be appropriate for one of our monthly meetings? If so, please send your ideas to Brian or Ondina Moehl.



Next Trail Guide
Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday,
March 10th

6:30 pm—

Visitor Center
Library

Our condolences to Steve Haiman and his family on the death of his beloved wife Sherry on March 1.

Monthly Meeting Minutes—February 10, 2010

There were 27 Trail Guides, 3 guests, and Ranger Heidi in attendance.

Fred's number for February was 148. The answer in the form of a question is "How many kinds of butterflies are there in San Diego County?" This number came from the checklist of butterflies on the San Diego Natural History Museum web site. Of this number, 119 are "true" butterflies and the remainder skippers. The main differences are skippers have antennae clubs hooked backward, stockier bodies, and typically quick, darting flight habits.

Fred reminded Trail Guides to sign up for walks and record the number of visitors and some interesting observations from the walk, including how visitors learned about the walk.

Fred announced the prize winner for the best walk write-up in January: Arleen Hitchcock for her Visitor Center Walk on January 10.

Fred reminded Trail Guides about the monthly wildlife tracking walks Mike Gibbs is leading on the first Saturday at 8:30 a.m. They start from various locations in the park, like the Bird Walks, so check the calendar on the MTRP public web site for the meeting place each month. Betty Matthews described seeing a pair of coyotes on the February walk.

Fred congratulated Trail Guide award winners announced at the ceremony on February 6. [See article below.]

Fred mentioned that he and Ranger Heidi were working up some of the discovery table ideas brainstormed at

the January meeting.

Program was a presentation on arthropods by Dr. Michael Wall from the San Diego Natural History Museum as part of Trail Guide training.

Upcoming Events:

Wildlife Tracking Walk with Mike Gibbs, Saturday, March 6, 8:30–10:30 a.m. Meet in front of Visitor Center.

The next meeting is March 10, 2010, 6:30 p.m. in the Visitor Center LIBRARY. The program will be a presentation on MTRP reptiles by Dr. Brad Hollingsworth from the San Diego Natural History Museum as part of Trail Guide training.

Respectfully submitted,

Fred Kramer, Acting Secretary

Congratulations to Trail Guide Award Winners by Fred Kramer, Trail Guide

Several Trail Guides were honored at the annual MTRP Volunteer Awards Ceremony in February. Congratulations to all these deserving Trail Guides!



Steve Haiman was selected as Trail Guide of the Year. Steve, a Trail Guide since 2006, has been an enthusiastic supporter of Mission Trails and led the most walks in 2009. He is also well-known for his portrayal of George Cowles.



Tom Thompson was named Visitor Center volunteer of the year and was also recognized for the most recorded volunteer hours in 2009 with a whopping 660. Tom is not only a Trail Guide and VC volunteer, but an active patrol member too. (photo by Fred Kramer)



Chris Axtmann was named the Gift Shop volunteer of the year and recognized for the third most recorded volunteer hours in 2009 with 464.5. (photo by Fred Kramer)

Jeanne Raimond received an award for five years of volunteer service. Several Trail Guides received awards for fifteen years: Bill Goldschneider, Bill Howell, Linda Kramer, George Varga, Tom Walters, and Bill White.

The Rains Came Down and the Floods Went Up!

story by Millie Basden, photos by Wendy Esterly, Trail Guides

On Monday, January 18, 2010, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported, "Light rain began to fall Sunday afternoon and into the evening throughout the county, a precursor to the heavy rainfall headed for San Diego County starting today, forecasters from the National Weather Service said." The forecasters got it right! Rainfall recorded at a private weather station located ½ mile from the MTRP Visitor Center totaled 4.78 inches during the period January 17 through 22. With all that rain, the San Diego River came alive in MTRP, as shown by these photos taken on January 20, 2010.

Clearly, a lot of water was moving through the park. But how much was it, and how does this scene compare to past history? In 2002, Dr. Philip R. Pryde, professor emeritus of geography at San Diego State University, spoke to

trail guides at a monthly meeting about the history of floods on the San Diego River. He reported that during the twenty largest floods of the twentieth

century, the maximum flows ranged from 2,900 to



70,200 cubic feet per second (cfs). Looking at these photos, do you want to

guess what the flow measured? If you are like me, you don't have a clue. The provisional measurements of flow for the San Diego River at Santee during

the period the photos were taken were charted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

We don't know from this data what the flow was at the exact point in time that the photos were taken. Although there were peaks above 2000 cfs around

January 20, the flows dipped into the hundreds each day. At the time of the photos, the flow could have been as low as 100 cfs, or as high as 2,500 cfs, which means that even at its peak, this flood does not

compare to the floods of the 20th century.

Littlefield, Dana. "Upcoming Storm Begins With Some Light Rain." *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Monday, January 18, 2010, accessed February 10, 2010 at <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/jan/18/upcoming-storm-begins-some-light-rain/>

"San Diego Weather at Mission Trails," accessed on February 10, 2010 at <http://www.wx4mt.com/wxraindetail.php>

California Thrasher

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is plain dark brown with a buff belly.

Locally the bird can easily be confused with the California Towhee until one sees the distinctive beak.

References:

Kaufman, Ken. 2000. *Birds of North America*. New York. Houghton MifflinCo.

Sibley, David A. 2004. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*. New York. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Website



Trail Guide Training Schedule

Here's the schedule of lectures for the Trail Guide training class. Lectures start around 7:45 p.m. unless there is a Trail Guide meeting (marked with an asterisk); then they start at 7:15 p.m. (Of course, you'll be coming to the meeting at 6:30 p.m.) Please feel free to attend any of the lectures as a refresher. Since we have a large class, please don't sit at the tables or take any handouts until all the regular students have received theirs.

3/10* Reptiles by Dr. Brad Hollingsworth

3/17 Indians by Judy Alvarez

What's Happening at the Park

Friday, March 12...

Stars at Mission Trails—Join members of the San Diego Astronomy Association from sunset to 10 p.m. at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground's Day Use Parking Lot. Telescopes available (weather permitting.)

Saturday, March 20...

Guided Bird Walk—Join resident birder and Trail Guide Jeanne Raimond for an adventure in bird watching! This month: Lake Murray—meet in the parking lot off Kiowa Drive 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Saturday, March 27...

Birding Basics—Resident birder Winona Sollock will teach 5 simple techniques for identifying birds at a glance. 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Visitor Center.

Saturday, March 27...

Star Party—Join resident stargazer and Trail Guide George Varga to view the night time sky. The Moon will be two days short of being full. Saturn will be rising in the east. Many open clusters in Auriga, Gemini and Canis Major will be up. Meet at the far end of the Kumeyaay Lake Campground Day Use Parking Lot. 6-9 p.m. (weather permitting.)

Saturday, April 3...

Tracking Walk—Learn the art of discovering signs left behind by resident creatures with Trail Guide and Tracking Team member Mike Gibbs. Meet at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground, 8:30 a.m.—10:30 a.m.



California Thrasher—Photo by George Varga



But some animals, like men,
leave a trail of glory behind
them. They give their spirit to
the place where they have lived,
and remain forever a part of the
rocks and streams and the wind
and sky.

~ Marguerite Henry, (1902-1997) *Brightly of the Grand Canyon*



*If you can't do a walk
you signed-up for,
arrange for someone to
take your place or let
Fred or Ranger Heidi
know you won't be
there.*

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

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The Trail Guide Program is dedicated to provide the visiting public with education and understanding of the unique environmental and historical attributes of Mission Trails Regional Park. The Trail Guides supplement the Park Rangers in outreach programs to the public.
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